

Castlemaine Naturalist May '97



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LODDON RIVER WALK

On the afternoon of 13 April I was fortunate in being able to join the Newstead Land Care group for their walk along the Loddon River. The walk started on the edge of Cairn Curran at Welshman's Reef, at the Trugeon's Road intersection. Trudgeon's Road is now an L-shaped road, but before the reservoir was built the corner of the L was obviously a crossroad. Two of the arms of the road are now in the reservoir.

The first part of the walk was across the dry bed of the reservoir. From here, no water could be seen. Across the dry bed, the palm tree at Mingus Crossing Road on the other side of the reservoir, was readily visible.

The next part of the walk was along the old Loddon River. The bed was clearly marked as a depression, lined with dead Red Gum. The banks here would have much the same shape as before the reservoir was built. Surprisingly, some of the Red Gum were still alive towards the river mouth. The water must recede often enough for the trees to survive. Some water was flowing, despite the dry conditions.

In several places there was an abundance of feathers and shot gun cartridges, to indicate that duck shooters had been active.

In places wave action from the reservoir has made cliffs at the edge of the reservoir. In one such area, concretions were abundant. It was thought that these were of limestone. This was confirmed; a sample was brought home and treated with acid. Rapid effervescence took place, and in a short time only a smudge of sandy material remained.

The route then followed the course of the Loddon back to Newstead. As expected, some magnificent Red Gums line the river. Most of the route was along crown land. One property however extends to the centre of the river.

Along of the river, the banks are about 4 metres high. At the two metre level, a dark band of humus shows the former soil level. Mining activities upstream resulted in several metres of sludge being deposited over the river flats. The flats must be much less fertile now than before European settlement.

Sedges and rushes are not abundant along this stretch of the river. Pacific Azolla was however plentiful. This is a floating fern, and lines stretches of the river. In a backwater near Newstead the whole surface was covered.

I had thought that European Wasps were insects that were associated with built up areas. However, one nest was seen close to the half-way point of the walk, and far from any human dwelling.

A most enjoyable walk. We are indeed fortunate in this district i having so many interesting walks.

Easter at Mungo

Here is a list, for March 28, of some of the things seen at Mungo over the Easter break - Chestnut-crowned Babbler, Pardalotes, Pied Butcherbird, Apostle Birds, wrens, Willie Wagtails, Australian Kestrel, a Wedgetailed Eagles' nest in the top of a pine tree, Crested Pigeons, Mallee Ringnecks, Blue Bonnets, Major Mitchell Cockatoo, Galahs, a Whip Snake, Pearl Bluebush, Black Bluebush, Porcupine Grass, Wilga, Rosewood, Belah, mallees, native pines, two Emus and Red Kangaroos.

Lorraine Rye.

Observations

* George and Phee Broadway were enjoying a quiet cuppa out near the birdbath watching a Preying Mantis swaying to and fro, getting more and more frustrated trying to figure out how to catch all those wasps which were, unfortunately for the mantis, under the dome of a wasp-trap.

* Ken Dredge was taken out to the back of the Port Campbell Motor Inn, where he was staying, by the manager who thought he would be interested in the birds just over the other side of the firebreak behind the motel. He was fascinated - by two Rufous Bristlebirds which were quite unconcerned at their presence and just went about their normal business. He and the manager stood and watched them for at least five minutes.

* Grey Kangaroos were reported on a Mt Franklin property for the first time. Doreen. Chris Morris also reported that a mob has been seen at Poverty Gully, and a mob of up to 16, have been on their block at Little Bendigo.

* Ern Perkins told of a wallaby being reported by Ian Johnson of Barkers Creek going into the dam to escape his dog. The animal would emerge each time Ian called the dog away, but the dog would rush back and the wallaby would return to the dam. Ian had finally to take to dog back to the house before the wallaby could make good its escape. People spoke of anecdotal evidence of Kangaroos drowning dogs in dams, but it was not known if wallabies would also do so.

* The 'pupa' that Stan Bruton brought to the March meeting climbed up onto the window two days later, and is still there. Perhaps the 'pupa' is actually a case-moth?

* An Echidna has been living in the bush behind 110 and 118 Blakeley Rd. for weeks, and Rita Mills was called over to see it as it was under the car next door. By the time she got over there it had left the car and was against the fence. Apparantly it was so used to the family next door that it was quite unworried by their voices, but would duck its head under the leaves when it heard Rita's. It finally decided she was 'safe' too and started to wander around with both Rita and granddaughter following with the camera. It fed from some ants in a small hole at the base of a tree, and was actually going from tree to

tree to find the ants.

On the following Monday it was found about 300 metres away, and kept going onto the road. It was rescued by using a thick burlap bag rolled over it and carried to where there was some food. Again it was unconcerned, and snuffled at her feet before wandering off. It seemed to be an old animal and had several fat white parasites around its ears, and broken quills, as well as a damaged nose, but more worrying was its weight. It was very light and seemed just skin and bone, which could have explained its wanderings in the early afternoon. It was left to itself after another photographic session, but at 5.30pm there was the sad news that someone had run over it as it was heading back across the road. The first car slowed and went around it, but the second just roared over it. It was a very sad ending to a friendly little animal which had become quite well known around the area.

* Brenda Envall reported again the solitary White-faced Heron at her place at Harcourt.

* George Broadway reported Pied Currawongs calling at Buda on 23/4.

* They have also been near 118 Blakeley Road on several occasions during the month, once having an argument with the local Grey Currawongs. Rita Mills

* Margaret Willis reported a flock of juvenile Crimson Rosellas enjoying the Claret Ash.

* George Broadway reported both White Cockatoos and Long-billed Correllas in the Saint Street pine trees. Also, the picnic area where the Field Nats Club planted five eucalypts several months ago, has been officially tidied and more planting is proposed.

* About twenty delicate Parson's Bands managed to force their way through the hard dry ground at Expedition Pass - even on the beaten path, which at present resembles concrete! Shirley Parnaby.

* At Sandon honeyeaters and other birds that have been absent over the hot weather have started returning in late March with the blossoming of the Grey box. Susanna Starr.

Southern Boobooks

April '97

So far there is no sign of the return of the Southern Boobook pair to their usual perch in the local Botanic Gardens. At this time last year they appeared for a short period in March/April, then disappeared until early June, when they settled in for winter and the breeding season. Unusually warm and dry conditions may have delayed their return and also their food supply. The thin foliage of their tree may also be a disadvantage on very warm days.

Shirley Parnaby

Camerons Crossing Outing

Camerons Crossing was discovered by the Club many years ago but as far as I can recall we have only been there couple of times. It is interesting geologically as well as a good place to see birds, especially raptors. It is on Tullaroop Creek about 6' or 7 kms south of the reservoir, and, when the reservoir is full, the creek up to the crossing itself is full. Although it is usually a great place for birds, fewer than usual were seen this year for some reason. The water is crystal clear upstream of the crossing and looked almost inviting - except it would have been a bit chilly.

There were the usual birds at the crossing, White-plumed Honeyeaters (there are Red Gums along the river) , Wrens (there's plenty of Wirilda to hide in) , Willy Wagtails, Brown Thornbills and a Dusky Moorhen (there are plenty of reeds, too). We didn't find Reed-warblers, and the discussion was whether they move north at this time of year.

We walked along the creek to the stile that the farmer has put over his fence for the likes of us - and fishermen - and walked through the paddocks. There is a cliff with caves to the west of the river flat and a Brown Falcon was seen and finally identified. Someone spotted a Wedgetailed Eagle, and then a Nankeen Kestrel. On the steep creek bank on the other side White-browed Scrub-wrens were seen hunting insects, and more wrens were seen. Even the telescope was brought into play to identify some other small birds - only to confirm that they were sparrows! Kookaburras were there, and a lone swan keeping just ahead of us as we walked downstream. Red-rumped Parrots burst out of an old Red Gum and flew back upstream, Mudlarks called, and Magpies, which were up on the plateau above in their dozens, occasionally were seen on the flat. A pair of White-faced Herons flew overhead and Welcome Swallows darted about, hunting insects and scooping up the still water. A pair of Black Ducks were also seen on the creek, and Masked Lapwings, Goldfinches and Little Ravens were also recorded. To cap all this the weather was fine, mild, sunny and almost still, and we walked along to the constant sound of the crickets.

When we got back to the cars and were having afternoon tea the sight of three Whistling Kites soaring above the cliff opposite, with the sun's rays lighting up their undersides, was a fitting end for a most enjoyable outing - even if we saw no sign of the reported Peregrine Falcons this time. It is very difficult to reach the Reservoir along the creek because there are cliffs further downstream, so perhaps that could be a possible site for a nest? I am still sure I saw one the last time I was there.

Rita Mills

Sandon, March '97

Pacific Black Duck	Yellow Thornbills
Australasian Grebe	Red Wattlebird
White-faced Heron	Yellow-faced,
Little Eagle	White-eared,
Brown Falcon	Yellow-tufted,
Masked Lapwing	Fuscous,
Common Bronzewing	White-plumed and
Galah	White-naped Honeyeaters
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Jacky Winter
Crimson Rosella	Scarlet Robin
Eastern Rosella	Rufous Whistler
Red-rumped Parrot	Grey Shrike-thrush
Southern Boobook Owl	Restless Flycatcher
Kookaburra	Magpie-lark
White-throated Treecreeper	Grey Fantail
Wren	Willie Wagtail
Spotted Pardalote	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Striated Pardalote	Australian Magpie
Speckled Warbler	Grey Currawong
Weebill	Australian Raven
Brown,	White-winged Chough
Buff-rumped,	Red-browed Finch
Yellow-rumped,	Diamond Firetail
Striated and	Welcome Swallow
	Susanna Starr

Bird Report, 61 Hunter St.

March/April

A lone Grey Shrike-thrush is visiting occasionally at present. A few Silvereyes and a pair of "firetails" (Red-browed Finches) share the bird bath with several New Holland Honeyeaters and Eastern Spinebills. A plague of sparrows has demolished the fruit on the grape vine and a family of Yellow-rumped Thornbills come frequently to graze on the dried areas of grass and to bathe on the warm days. The migratory Tasmanian Silvereyes have not dropped in on us for the usual feasting on grapes and figs - in any case, the figs have remained extremely small and hard, so there's not much to attract the Silvereyes to our garden this year.

Shirley Parnaby

FROM THE COMMITTEE

Please remember that your Subscription is now due if you haven't yet paid. A list of fees is on the back page.

Wednesday Walks It was decided to recommence the Wednesday Walks in Spring. Commencing in early September, these outings will continue

to about the end of October, the main local flower season. Starting at 4 o'clock the outing will be to a nearby location, and will last for about an hour, and tend to cover areas which are missed on the longer outings.

Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Surveys. The dates for this year's counts are May 10-11 and August 2-3. If you are not going to Glenburn, and will be able to do a count on either the Saturday or the Sunday, please ask for a form and information. The purpose of these counts is to obtain estimates of numbers, locations, forest types, food resources and other bird species with which Swift Parrots, returning from Tasmania, and the Regent Honeyeaters, reappearing after their mysterious post breeding disappearance, are associated. As the reappearances tend to coincide it was decided to combine the surveys this year.

'**Volunteer**', the newsletter of the Threatened Bird Network is available at the meeting. It includes information on the Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater surveys from last year, and on Vic Hurley's Peregrine Falcon survey.

Great Dividing Trail The Club has renewed its membership with the G.D.T. Forthcoming Public Walks are-

Sun. late May... **Hepburn Festa.** Duration 1-2hrs, Leave Hepburn General Store at 9.30am. Leaders Pat Conroy, Norma D. Watch the papers for details.

Sun. 29/6 **Franklin Gorge.** Duration 4-6 hrs. Meet Sawpit Gully Rd. turnoff. Leader, Ed. Butler.

Details, Ed Butler 0353 482367 (BH) or Pat Conroy 0353 482825 (AH).

NAME CHANGES

The latest edition of *A census of the vascular plants of Victoria* by J H Ross continues to list changes to the names of our flora. Edition 4 had 213 pages. The new fifth edition has 230 pages. The census lists the current name as accepted by the National Herbarium of Victoria, and the old names are also given, for names used by JH Willis in his handbooks. The next edition of the census should however be smaller, as old names will be given only if used by the new Floras of Victoria.

Some of the name changes are

Pines. *Pinus halepensis* and *Pinus sabiniana* are added to the list of naturalised flora. Fame for Castlemaine?

Common Wheat Grass becomes *Elymus scaber* (not *Elymus scabrus*)

Spear Grasses. Native species are now in the genus *Austrostipa*. Introduced Spear Grasses are in the genus *Nassella*.

Red-anther Wallaby Grass has had its second name change. It is now *Joycea pallida*.

Wallaby Grasses. After a short time as species of *Rytidosperma*, the local Wallaby Grasses are now back as *Danthonia*. This is however, only a temporary change, and all can be expected to change in the next census. However, *Danthonia semiannularis* is now

Notodanthonia semiannularis. Some of the alpine wallaby grasses remain as *Rytidosperma*.

Shaggy Pea. The beautiful trailing pea to be found in the ridge forests is now *Podolobium procumbens*. The Alpine Shaggy Pea also becomes *P. alpestre*. *Oxylobium ellipticum* also from the alpine areas, remains unchanged.

Wattles. All are still members of the *acacia* genus. However, as in edition 4, synonyms are provided e.g. Cootumundra Wattle as *Racosperma baileyana*.

Bloodwoods are in the *Corymbia* genus.

EP.

Eucalypt subspecies. *The new edition of Ross lists a number of subspecies for some of the local eucalypts. Which subspecies are local?*

Green Mallee - *E. viridis* ssp *viridis*. The other subspecies *wimmerensis*, has more lanceolate leaves and slightly angled fruit, and grows in the Wimmera.

Manna Gum - *E. viminalis*. The large, white-barked eucalypt that is abundant along rivers and in the wetter forests (e.g. at Trentham) is subspecies *viminalis*.

Subspecies *cygnetensis* has buds in 7s or mixed 3s and 7s, and has rough bark over the whole trunk. It grows in SW Victoria and north to the Grampians. The form on Mt Alexander approaches this form, and determination by the Herbarium is desirable. The other subspecies *pyroriana*, is a rough-barked tree from South Gippsland and the Bellarine Peninsula.

Red Box - *E. polyanthemus* ssp *vestita*. Subspecies *longior* has longer, lanceolate leaves and grows in East Gippsland.

Snow Gum - *E. pauciflora* ssp *pauciflora*. This is the lowland form. It is also abundant at high altitudes. Subspecies *niphophila* is a mallee-like tree at the highest altitudes. Two other subspecies have restricted distributions in Eastern Victoria.

Swamp Gum - *E. ovata* var *ovata*. The other variety, var *grandiflora*, grows in the far SW of Victoria, and has larger buds, fruit and leaves.

Yellow Gum - *E. leucoxylon* ssp *pruinosa* has waxy juvenile leaves and is the local subspecies. Other subspecies are ssp *leucoxylon* (with fruit to 1.2 cm on long stalks, from Western Victoria); ssp *megalocarpa* (with fruit longer than 1.2 cm, and with large leaves, from the Nelson district) and ssp *stephaniae* (with small fruit on short stalks, from the Wimmera).

EP

An encounter with a ferocious bear

"I was going on with ease cutting and splitting timber when Evan Lewis turned up with his gun and two dogs. The dogs disturbed a big bear which came my way and I only had an axe to defend myself. Fortunately the ferocious creature charged after the dogs, but before I was really aware of the contest and the danger, Evan shot him and took him home where he skinned the animal."

Joseph Jenkins, in *Diary of A Welsh Swagman*, August 1881. He was cutting timber at Ravenswood.

C . F . N . C . PROGRAMME

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church Hall. Entrance to car park behind the Art Gallery, Lyttleton Street.

Fri May 9 Ants of the Ironbark Forests , Simon Hinkley, Museum of Victoria.
8pm UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat, Sun May 10 & 11 Autumn Overnight Excursion to Alan Reid's property,
"Glenburn".

~~Sun~~ Sat May 18 Newstead Walk. Leader S. Starr. *Newstead bridge 1Pm*
~~Leave 13 Mostyn St at 1.30 pm or meet at Newstead near the hotel at 1.40pm.~~

Sat 10 or Sun 11 May Swift Parrot and Regent Parrot Survey. For details see inside (notes from the Committee)

Fri June 13 Frogs, Graeme Watson, Melbourne University. 8pm UCA hall.

Sat June 14. Tang Tang Swamp and Tennyson. All day excursion. Leader R. Mills. Leave 27 Doveton St at 9.30am. Bring lunch, etc. and binocs.

Fri July 11 Club Members. Subjects and speakers still to be decided. 8pm UCA hall.

Fri Oct 10 Plants of the Ballarat District, Pat and Bill Murphy, Ballarat F.N.C. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sat Oct 12 Mt Beckwith. All day excursion. Leaders Pat and Bill Murphy Ballarat FNC. Meet at Clunes P.O. at 11am.

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Committee: G. Broadway(Pres.), M. Willis (V.P.), M. Oliver (Sec.), B. Envall (Treas.), C. Morris, K. Turner, R.Mills (P.O. & N/L Ed.), E. Perkins, B. Maund, J. Hewetson, M. Dredge, J. Turnbull.

Meetings:-

General - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at Uniting Church hall, Mostyn St. at 8.00pm.

Business - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. All Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions 1997 - Ordinary Membership: Single \$16 Family \$24
Pensioner/Student: Single \$12 Family \$18. Supporting \$25
Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.
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